1: McGee E-2 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU71

and the shell-strata are so like and so different from any other fictile wares as to be distinguished at a glance. Hence it would seem manifest that the Seri olla must constitute a normal nucleus for the Seri esthetic; yet even here the field is practically barren, as is shown by the study of a score of usable and mortuary specimens and of thousands of sherds. The most ornate specimen seen is that depicted in plate XXXIII. Its form, like that of the balsa, is a mechanical equation of forces and materials; its body-color is that of the clay, blotched and blackened irregularly by the smoke of the firing; and its decoration is limited to 17 faint lines or bands radiating downward from the ill-shaped neck. The radial bands were evidently drawn by a finger dipped in clayey water after the vessel was otherwise finished for the firing; they are irregular in placement, width, length, and direction; they generally run in pairs, two straight lines alternating with two zigzag lines, though the circuit is completed by two zigzags drawn wide apart and separated by a single straight line. The meaning of the device (if meaning there be) was not directly ascertained; but it is suggestive that its maker and owner was the mother of the youthful warrior from whom the rattlesnake necklace was obtained (her face-symbol is that shown in the lower left figure of plate XXVI), and that the vessel was surrendered more reluctantly than any other article obtained from the tribe.

Another utensil of some importance to the tribe is a basket of the type illustrated in figure 24. It is manufactured with much skill and is used for various domestic purposes, being practically water-tight and unbreakable, and materially lighter than even the unparalleledly light fictile ware of the Seri. In form and size and weave the half dozen examples seen correspond with widespread southwestern types; yet it is noteworthy that while otherwise similar baskets are habitually decorated by other basket-making tribes, the Seri specimens were absolutely devoid of decorative devices.

Practically the only remaining artifacts available for decoration are those connected with archery; and it suffices to say that while the bows are skilfully made and the arrows constructed with exceeding pains, not a single specimen seen showed the slightest trace of symbolism or of nonutilitarian motive.

Summarily, the Seri are characterized by extreme esthetic poverty. This has been noted by the early missionaries and by the few other travelers who have approached their haunts, as well as by the vaqueros on the Encinas and Serna and other ranchos bordering their range, who know them as "los pobrecitos". All observers have been struck with their destitution and squalor; yet when the impressions are particularized they are seen to denote absence of the poor luxuries, rather than the bare necessities, of primitive life. The people are pathetically poor in the industrial sense; their equipment in artifacts—implements, weapons, utensils, habitations, apparel—is meager almost, if not quite, beyond parallel in America; yet their esthetic equipment, practically

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

137 chiefly in the form of wounded and dwarfed specimens, seems to indicate that its original range comprised all Seriland; while its dearth suggests destruction nearly to the verge of extinction by improvident generations better armed with their hupfs and harpoons and shell-cups than the subhuman beasts against whom the plant is so well protected.

285 415 Aside from the universally used hupf and ahst (which may be regarded as differentiated implements or tools), the only special device used in connection with vegetal food is the basket, or, rather, basketry tray (illustrated in figure 24). This ware is of the widespread coil type so characteristic of southwestern tribes. The coil is a wisp of stems and splints of a fibrous yet spongy shrub, apparently torote; and the woof consists of paloblanco (?) splints deftly intertwined by aid of an awl. The construction is fairly neat and remarkably uniform; the

FIG. 24—Seri basket.

coiled wisps vary somewhat in size, both intentionally and inadvertently, ranging from an average of three-eighths of an inch toward the bottoms of the larger specimens to half that diameter in the smaller specimens and toward the margins of the larger. The initial coil starts in an indefinite knot, rather than a button, at the center; and the spiral is continuous throughout, the final coil being quite deftly worked out to a single splint smoothly stitched to the next lower spiral with the woof splints. The ware is practically water-tight, remarkably strong and resilient, and quite durable in the dry climate of Seriland. Ordinarily the basket is abandoned when the bottom decays or breaks, but an ancient specimen obtained on Isla Tiburon was roughly rebottomed with a patch of sealskin attached by means of sinew. The baskets are notably uniform in shape, though the size varies from 8 or 9 inches to fully 17 inches in diameter.

The most striking feature of the Seri basketry, as of the pottery, is

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

extreme lightness in proportion to capacity, a quality due to the spongy character of the torote coil and to the thinness of the splints used in the woof. The inside dimensions, weight, and dry-measure capacity (filled to the level of the brim with rice) of two typical specimens approaching extremes in size are indicated in the accompanying table. As noted elsewhere, the ware is absolutely without decorative devices in weave, paint, or form; it is baldly utilitarian, a model of economy in material and in the balance between structure and function, approaching in this respect the thin-walled canteen ollas, the graceful balsa, and the light but effective harpoon. The structural correspondence of the ware to a widespread type and its limited use among the tribe suggest an aecultural origin for the Seri basketry; but the delicate adjustment of means to ends in the manufacture and the strictly local character of the material quite as strongly suggest an indigenous development.

Museum No.	Diameter	Depth	Weight	Capacity
174539	38 cm. (15 in.)	9.5 cm. (3¾ in.)	482 g. (17 oz.)	6.25 l. (6.6 qt.)
174538a ..	23 cm. (9 in.)	5.0 cm. (2 in.)	142 g. (5 oz.)	1 l. (1.06 qt.)

It is impossible to portray justly the food habits of the Seri without some reference to a systematic scatophagy, which seems to possess ritual as well as economic features. In its simplest aspect this custom is connected with the tuna harvests; the fruits are eaten in enormous quantity, and are imperfectly digested, the hard-coated seeds especially passing through the system unchanged; the feces containing these seeds are preserved with some care, and after the harvest is passed the board (desiccated, of course, in the dry climate) is ground between hupf and abst, and winnowed in baskets precisely as are the mesquite beans; and the product is then eaten either dry or in the form of atole like the mesquite meal. In superficial view this food factor is the precise homologue of the "second harvest" of the California Indians as described by Clavigero, Baegert,[1] and others; but it gains importance, among

[1] "An Account of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Californian Peninsula, as given by Jacob Baegert, a German Jesuit missionary. . . . Translated and arranged for the Smithsonian Institution by Charles Rau; Ann. Rep. Smithsonian Inst. for 1863, pp. 352-369. Baegert's account of foods (pp. 360-367) is so apposite as to be worthy of quotation nearly entire:

"Notwithstanding the barrenness of the country, a Californian hardly ever dies of hunger, except, perhaps now and then an individual that falls sick in the wilderness and at a great distance from the mission, for those who are in good health trouble themselves very little about such patients, even if these should happen to be their husbands, wives, or other relatives; and a little child that has lost its mother or both parents is also occasionally in danger of starving to death, because in some instances no one will take charge of it, the father being sometimes inhuman enough to abandon his offspring to its fate.

"The food of the Californians, as will be seen, is certainly of a mean quality, yet it keeps them in a healthy condition, and they become strong and grow old in spite of their poor diet. The only period of the year during which the Californians can satisfy their appetite without restraint is the season of the pitahayas, which ripen in the middle of June and abound for more than eight weeks. The gathering of this fruit may be considered as the harvest of the native inhabitants. They can eat as much of it as they please, and still some this food agrees so well that they become corpulent during that period; and for this reason I was sometimes unable to recognize at first sight individuals, otherwise perfectly

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930) 1931 NU31 Seri NU31

sounds like an expectable enough mythic idea, but seems involved with McGee's dubious conceptions as to totemism, discussed below. 114 193

The two-pointed fish-spear, with serrated points 6 inches long and spreading 5°, seen by Hardy (McGee, p. 193), is interesting because seemingly unreported in or near the area. 114 227

"Fishing" with staked pelicans who are then fed by free birds, is authenticated by the statement of Venegas for lower California, (McGee, p. 193). [226 231]

No fish nets, hooks, or lines were seen by McGee among the abandoned effects on Tiburon (p. 194). This is in accord with my observation. The abundance of sharks may interfere with net or deep water fishing.

The bow (p. 200) is of *palo blanco;* the release (pls. 28, 29), Mediterranean; the archer's position (pl. 29), with elbow above head, suggests a quick downward shot at a target or game lying on the ground not far away. 114 411

Mesquite, according to McGee (p. 207), is ground on the metate. Sr. Thomson told me of its being pounded in a hole in the ground. The Seri gave me the name a'kaʟa for what I understood to be this earth mortar. According to Sr. Thomson's description, the flour from the first beans cakes and lines the cavity firmly, so that the bulk of the material is secured quite cleanly. In general, mesquite is mortar-pounded rather than metate-ground by the tribes from whom we have records, as is expectable from the woody nature of the beans. 114 252

McGee (p. 207) noted the viznaga cactus, Echinocistus, as rare in the Seri habitat, presumably owing to its use for water by the natives. I made the same observation on the mainland, but Sr. Thomson stated that along the roads the plant is being gathered for candying. 114 137

The one basket described by McGee (p. 208, fig. 24) is bundle-coiled and plain. The only one I saw in use among the Seri was ornamented with a plain reddish band. Sr. Thomson presented me with two which bear patterns (fig. 13), and showed me a photograph of a collection made by Mr. Davis for the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, nearly all of which were decorated, some fairly elaborately. Several of these are shown by courtesy of that institution in figure 12. As McGee observes, there is obvious resemblance to Southwestern baskets; especially of the Papago, Pima and Apache. Southern California basketry is less similar. That of Baja California is unknown from specimens, though the mention of water-tight vessels used for winnowing and parching suggests a coiled tray of Seri type. The surviving tribes of Sonora other than the Seri use few baskets distinguishable from those of the non-Indian population. 114 285 [171]

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930) 1931 NU31 Seri NU31

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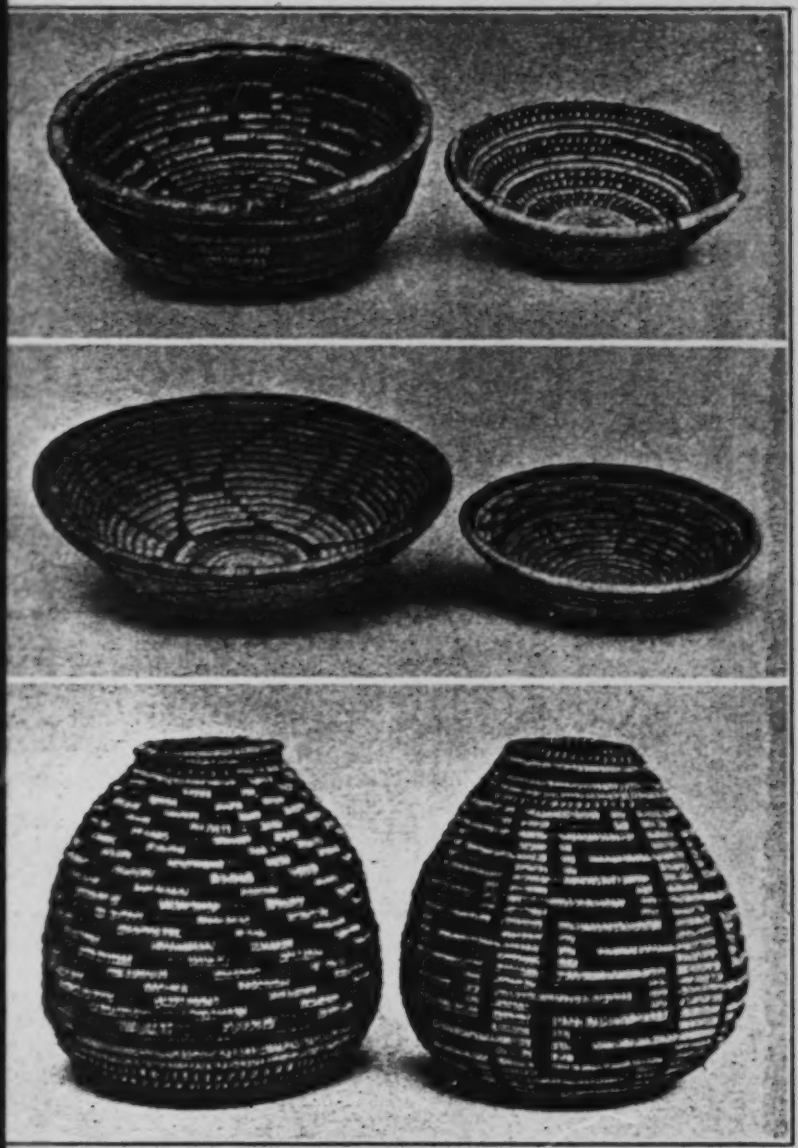

FIG. 12. *Seri Baskets in Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.*
Nos. 15—4279, 4285, 4292, 4236, 4247, 4249.

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930)1931 NU31 Seri NU31

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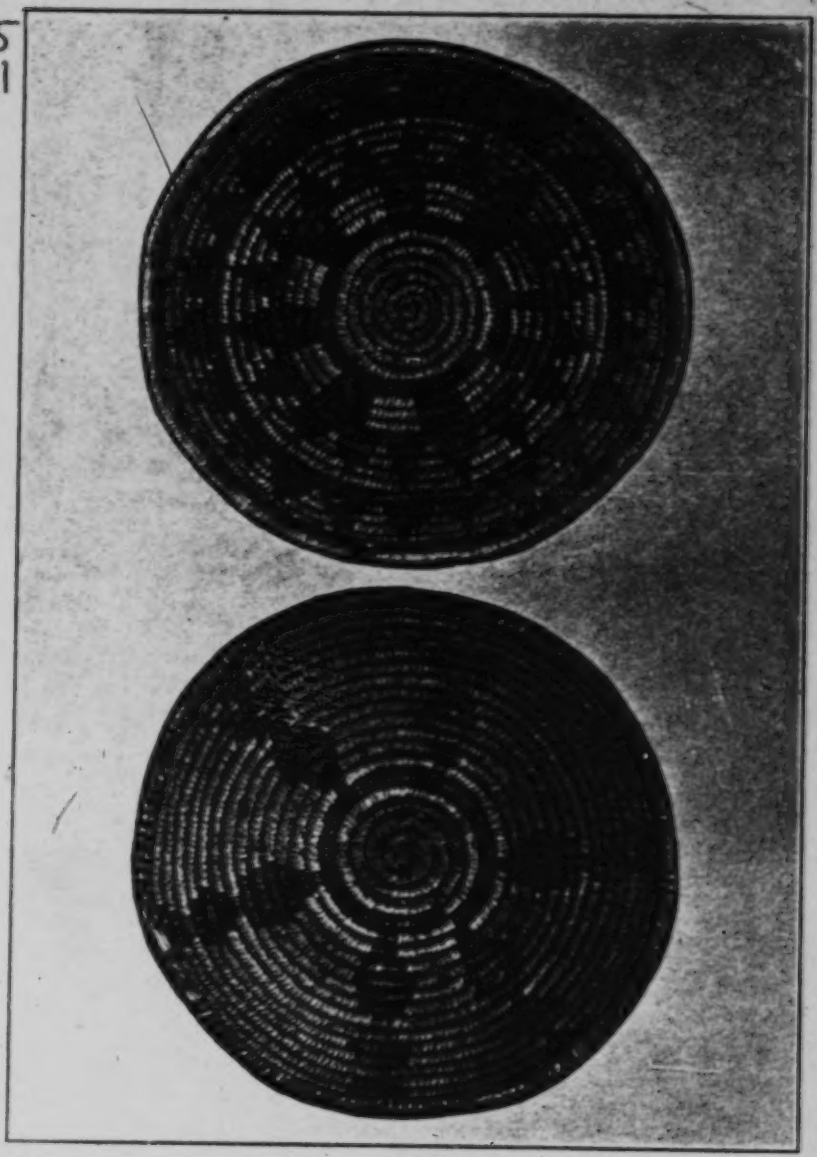

FIG. 13. *Seri Baskets in University of California Museum of Anthropology.*

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FIG. 6. DOMESTIC SCENE IN A SERI VILLAGE

[p. 197(A)]

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342
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FIG. 13. PREPARING BASKETRY MATERIAL
THE SPLINTS ARE MADE BY HAND AND MOUTH STRIPPING OF THE BRANCHES OF TORNTE AND PALO BLANCO.

[p. 261(c)]

5:Dawson N-5 (1940) 1944 NU31 Seri NU31

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415
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1. A basket of cactus meal.

2. A Seri village on Tiburon Island. Note the large shells of the sea turtle that serves as food.

3. Making the Seri basket. House is constructed of ocotillo branches and brush.

[p. 135]

5:Dawson N-5 (1940) 1944 NU31 Seri NU31

252 of nutritious material which was ground to powder on their stone ahsts, winnowed in shallow baskets and made into a meal or paste.

764 824 The abundant cacti of many species served several other functions in the domestic economy of the Seris. The thorny cholla whose insipid fruits were not fit to eat and whose spines were a constant threat to the unprotected bodies of the Seris, found one use, nevertheless, in the burial procedure. After a body was partly covered with earth in the three foot deep grave, it was densely overlaid with chollas before leveling, to discourage the coyotes from digging for the body.

396 824 The dry skeletons of the giant cacti provided the long, cylindrical poles used in knocking off ripe pitahayas as well as in all other instances in which a straight, slender pole was needed. Since the advent of the open boat in modern times, the cactus skeleton has come in for a new use, for after trituration between stone ahst and hupf, it was found to yield a satisfactory caulking compound when mixed with sea-lion oil.

312 824 The barrel cacti, *Ferocactus Wislizenii* and *F. Coulteri*, though ordinarily abundant on the Sonoran desert are rare in Seriland and practically absent from Isla Tiburon where they may easily have been exterminated by the improvident Seris during their centuries of occupancy on account of their recognized value as water providers on the wastelands over which the Seris so frequently ventured.

342 [132] 824 These Indians found housing no problem, for, living under a climate in which frost is rare and rain infrequent, they found little need for shelters except for protection against the blazing desert sun. Camps that were occupied for more than a day or two, however, usually saw the appearance of a group of crude sun shelters. These were usually made of long, flexible ocotillo branches, *Fouquieria splendens*, stuck in the sand and fashioned into an arched framework over which a more or less complete covering of brush was piled. If, by the sea, a windbreak were desired, the brush top and siding were usually augmented by the addition of several empty turtle shells.

262 824 On the delta plain of the Rio Sonora, the mesquite, *Prosopis juliflora*, grows in remarkable luxuriance, these gnarled, spiny trees forming an almost continuous open forest 20-40 feet high. Its fruit, consisting of small, hard beans borne in slender, woody pods forms a concentrated, starchy food that the Seris found highly nutritious if not appetizing. In late summer when all fresh vegetable food had withered and disappeared, provided the turtle fisheries had not yet attracted them back to their island, they often spent [252] some weeks gathering the beans and grinding them into a meal which was eaten as a watery atole or as a paste mixed with sea-lion oil. The more straggly and thorny cat's claw mesquite, *Acacia Greggii*, and the ironwood, *Olneya tesota*, also yielded woody beans in limited quantity.

In the deeper gorges of the mountains the Seris found *Guaiacum Coulteri* [019] yielding a berry of medicinal properties and also *Jacquinia pungens* which [334] produced a nut, edible when not quite ripe, and forming a favorite rattlehead when dry.

Along sandy washes, particularly on the lower flood plain of the llano grows a low, shrubby weed, *Hymenoclea monogyra*. Although during times of drought it shrinks to stunted tussocks, after periods of heavy rain its flourishing fens produce abundant seeds eaten both by the beasts of the plain and formerly by the Seris.

Before the advent of the tin can and the cardboard carton, basketry was [191] an important hand craft among these Indians

[Text continues on p. 138--Analyst]

5:Dawson N-5 (1940) 1944 NU31 Seri NU31

an important handicraft among these Indians. They made a shallow, coil type basket such as is characteristic of many southwestern tribes. The Seri basket, however, was remarkable for its extreme lightness in proportion to capacity, a quality due to the spongy character of the coil made of a whisp of splints of the torote. Several torotes are found in the region, the commonest species being *Jatropha cardiophylla*. Also used were the torote amarillo, *Jatropha spatulata*, torote blanco, *Bursera microphylla*, and torote prieto, *Bursera laxiflora*. The woof consisted of splints of palo blanco, *Acacia Willardiana*, or of baraprieta, *Caesalpinia gracilis*, deftly interlaced by means of a bone awl to form a smooth, practically waterproof utensil.

In pre-Columbian times the Seris commonly sought wild game, mostly deer, without the aid of weapons, using only their tremendous physical endurance against their prey, chasing the animal until it was exhausted and could be thrown to the ground. With the introduction of iron, however, the development of the bow and arrow achieved prominence, for the shaping and fastening of points had long retarded the exploitation of these implements. Few straight stemmed or straight grained plants grow in Seriland suitable for making arrow shafts, but on the flanks of the deeper gorges of Sierra Seri and Sierra Kunkaak on Tiburon Island, the Indians found one leafy shrub that filled the need, *Sapium biloculare*. The juice of this plant is also said to have been used for arrow poison. The bow was preferably of palo blanco, wrapped and strung with mesquite fiber cord.

The modern Seri tribe consists of barely more than 100 souls, with early extinction threatening from imported diseases. Their natural habits are now vastly modified and they live a comparatively sedentary life near the village of Kino, scavengering for fish heads and other refuse discarded by the fishermen, now and then fishing for themselves when in need. Every year, however, they trek off to the cactus forest for the annual feast, and in late summer many may be seen camping among the mesquite groves near the Kino well where an abundance of both mesquite beans and water makes for easy living.

462 desert plants or littoral fishlets from tide-pools
or of the shellfish. Both men and women will
[224] bring in an occasional rattler, although women
are more likely to do this because they spend more
[857] time in the desert. Children of both sexes are
engaged in the female occupations here, but ado-
[883] lescent boys already join in their fathers' hunts
on land or sea.

342 Housing has undergone some changes. In the
184 desert or on Tiburon the Indians construct the
kind of shelter they did in the recorded past,
an ocotillo frame, bent over in the middle and
covered up with dried plant debris and twigs
from the desert, or with the sail cloth. But in
Desemboque they have more substantial houses—
of wattle and adobe, with flat roofs, rectangular
or square, often with corrugated tin or drift
planks and other debris piled up on top, or along
the walls.

178 In the remainder of their material culture, not
much has been left from years past although one
must remember that from the very beginning of
[391] recorded Serian history it has been of a most
[412] meager sort. Pelican robes, which some Seris ap-
parently still wore in 1939 are gone for good.
[323] So are the stone tools. So is the pottery which had
probably disappeared in Kroeber's time. The hu-
[301] man hair necklace with rattlesnake rattles is also
a thing of the past. The rattlesnake skin belts
[291] McGee (1898:170) described and figured are
probably all gone. I havn't seen or heard of any.

412 But what remains much as they had been in
● 285 1894 are the bone-awls. These are made of burros'
carpals and the blossoming of basketry, owing to

[P. 8A]

9:Malkin E-5 (1953-1958)1962 MU31 Seri MU31

412 the stimulus of the tourist trade, has kept this
●285 tool alive. Another survival from McGee's times
301 are *Olivella* shell necklaces.

Seri Antecedants and Relationship

174 For complete lack of archaeological information, little can be deduced about Seri antecedents. Speculations can be made only on the basis of similarities of their post-historic cultures with the cultures of the surrounding tribes.

171 Individual traits between the Seri and their
174 neighbors show discordant connections. Comparative data assembled by Kroeber, Beals and Driver & Massey suggest almost equal possibilities of derivation from the Cochimí, the Gila, Pimá and the Yuman tribes but favor much less connections to the south. Much is made of the basketry. Archae-
[172] ological basketry has been unearthed since the work of Kroeber and Beals was published (Massey, MS.), but it is different from the Serian. Seri basketry shows closest relationship to Pima-Papago complex (Malkin, MS.). But part of this may be not only post-historic but certainly very recent and is hardly an argument in favor of the Pima-Papago connections.

Kroeber (1930:5) thought that on the face of it, the Seri showed greatest affinity to the Cochimí on the grounds of their general development of economy—the hunting and gathering subsistence. But he also pointed out that relationship with the Cochimí may rest ultimately on the linguistic analysis if the Cochimí language can still be recorded—which is most dubious.

[P. 8 B]

10: Davis E-5 (1922-ca. 1939) 1965 NU31 Seri NU31

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Carrying firewood

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Seri basket maker - 1934

157 The women are virtuous and faithful and perform all the duties of
152 wife and mother and bear their share of hardships. The hard life,
[145] exposure and struggle for existence soon causes hard features, wrinkles
[165] and ugliness. Many babies die young and the tribe probably numbers
[167] only about two hundred.

The dancing by the driftwood fires continued as we turned in to
123 rest, our eyes constantly drawn to the flame and the glittering eyes in the wild dark faces, while the waves of the sea accompanied the chanting in that mysterious isle of Seriland.

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Seris - off to the fishing grounds - December 1934. Alcatraz Island in distance.

222 In Seriland most of the food comes from the sea. During April and May, at the time of my first visit, a green grass growing on the sea bottom was detached and washed ashore. The women dragged it up on the bank near camp and spread it out to dry. Some of the stalks contained about seven fine green seeds the size of a pin head. When dry, the
[285] women threshed them out with sticks on a piece of canvas. These are cleaned by the deft use of the *batea*, or winnowing basket, of which these people are pastmasters.

252 A pint of these fine seeds were parched in an olla over coals of driftwood and constantly stirred to prevent burning. It was then ground
262 on a flat rock like a *metate*---any flat rock---into a green meal which was very nourishing. This was cooked in an olla with turtle oil, making a porridge like thick green paint. It was then drunk or eaten with the fingers. If there is plenty, two fingers are used; if not, only one finger.

285 [224] I watched a woman make a basket. She used young branches from the terote tree, I think *terote blanco*. The bark was peeled and shredded into two parts, the heart taken out and kept separate. The coils of the round part were put in a pot of hot water to soften, and the edge of the basket was soaked a little in hot water. The center of the coils or woof consisted of six or eight strips of heart while the outer sap wood was woven around in regular coil-weave fashion.

[287] [414] A brad of deer shin-bone sharpened on pumice to a needle point was used as a brad. With this brad she split the fiber, held one piece in her mouth, and stripped the back down. Then she punched a hole in the bone brad, inserted the sharp end of the fiber and pulled it almost through. She then repeated the operation, adding a strip of heart once in a while. These baskets are coarse and unattractive, but they are hard and tough and stand heavy use.

323 Cooking vessels consist of two or three cooking ollas that nest together to facilitate transportation. These are made of coarse clay, solely for utility without regard for beauty of shape, color or design. In burning these ollas they use the shell of the sea turtle. [237] [372] The cells of the shell are filled with a fine oil and this burns the ollas. On most of the other places on the mainland, the Indians use cow chips, or dried droppings to fire the clay.

283 484 123 We proposed to shift camp to Tinajanita, our first landing place, where Herrera was to meet us in two days with the Chief and some of his men. Since it was blowing, he said the men couldn't fish and they would be on land probably hunting, so he would be able to see them. [271] At this time they gathered *sescal* on an island off the west coast to make the liquor they used at fiestas, weddings and other celebrations.

Herrera left at five o'clock in the morning, with a swinging gait, for the opposite side of the Island. The distance around by boat would be fifty miles, and across, only about twenty or twenty-five---a full day's trip and hard, as mountains would have to be crossed and the rocks were sharp and the way difficult.

123 We had breakfast on rice and bread. Our rations are running low and we expect to move this morning. We made arrangements about the native boat and saw Blanco trot off with two five-gallon cans for water, a distance of ten miles. We went to the camp to get a few things---an old basket, a Pelican hide and other things, and then we asked the help of everybody to get the boat down to water---the tide was very low. The one man, the women and five of us were required to drag and push the boat to water.

We waved goodbye, loaded her up and then rowed against the tide and wind for miles, and finally landed in a lovely sheltered lagoon, built our fire and had lunch. A few crabs were speared, and late in the afternoon the wind shifted. We loaded the boat again and pushed off for Tinajanita, our first landing place. After rowing, we raised

[text continues on p.174]